

~~Secret~~*A Security Officer's view*

## On The Ground with the U-2

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*Editor's Note: This article is based on a 17 December 1992 interview with Joe Murphy, former Security Officer with the U-2 program. Some context is drawn from **The CIA and Overhead Reconnaissance: The U-2 and Oxcart Programs, 1954-1974**, by Gregory W. Pedlow and Donald E. Welzenbach, which was published in 1992 by CIA's History Staff with a Secret NoFORN classification.*

By the early 1950s, the United States had perceived an urgent and growing need for strategic intelligence on the Soviet Union and the states of Eastern Europe, which had been curtailed off from the outside world. The Soviet military was carrying out its planning, production, and employment activities with the utmost secrecy. The Communist states' stringent security measures had blunted traditional methods for gathering intelligence, including the use of secret agents, travelers, wiretaps, and postal intercepts. At great risk US Air Force and Navy aircraft had been conducting peripheral reconnaissance and shallow-penetration overflights, but these missions were paying a high price in lives lost and increased international tension. Furthermore, many important areas of the Soviet Union lay beyond the range of existing reconnaissance aircraft. The Air Force had therefore begun to develop a high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft that would be able to conduct deep-penetration reconnaissance missions over the Soviet Union.

Because the loss of such an aircraft deep in Soviet territory could escalate tensions, President Eisenhower and his advisers argued for civilian overflights in unarmed, unmarked aircraft. In their view, the organization most suited for this mission was the CIA. Accordingly, they authorized the development of a new non-military aircraft to be manned by civilians and operated only under cover and in the greatest secrecy. On 29 April 1955, Richard Bissell, Special Assistant to the Director of Central Intelligence, signed an agreement with the Air Force

and the Navy in which the services agreed that the CIA "assumed primary responsibility for all security" for the overhead reconnaissance project.

### Coming Aboard

My association with the U-2 program began in New York City in 1955, when a priest friend of mine from an earlier foray into seminary studies arranged for me to meet with a recruiter from Washington. At the time, I was working as a sales trainee for American Airlines. During our meeting in my Brooklyn neighborhood, the recruiter never revealed his CIA affiliation; he simply identified a career possibility in a government program that required security officers. Job requirements included remaining single for a number of years and being willing to spend a good deal of time overseas.

Fascinated by the lure of secret government programs and overseas travel, my career quickly changed direction. Within a few months of my initial interview, I was in Washington where, along with about 80 other men recruited for the same clandestine venture, I underwent polygraph testing and medical exams. Most of the recruits were from New York and New England; all were college graduates, and some had advanced degrees or government backgrounds.

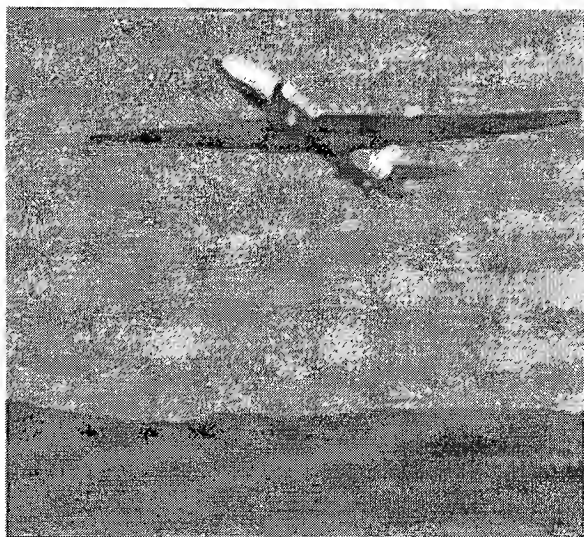
### Training

After our initial screening, a CIA security official briefed us on the U-2 program and told us that we were needed in the field as soon as possible. For the next five to six weeks, my new colleagues and I underwent basic training in physical security in the Washington area, including a period of weapons training (b)(1)

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*First U-2 flight, 4 August 1955.*

We called this training (b)(1) where security and compartmentation were the order of the day. Our small group of recruits often mixed with a group of more experienced security officers who also were preparing for various overseas missions.

Everyone (b)(1) had an alias, and I did not know these officers' true names. Several years later, I would see some of them in Japan, where I was stationed with a U-2 detachment, but we were trained not to acknowledge any prior association to help preserve our respective covers. We laugh about it now, but the discipline helped to maintain clandestine programs.

### **The Ranch**

After completing the basic training, I joined a contingent of CIA, Air Force, and contractor personnel sent in February 1956 to a remote site near the Nevada Test Site at Watertown, Nevada, to prepare for our specific overseas missions. From Monday through Friday at "the Ranch," experienced Office of Security (OS) officials supervised security officer candidates in personnel security, weapons training, access control, document control, and courier duties.

In addition to protecting project aircraft and personnel, we were to escort operational film from the field to Headquarters. Security procedures established at

the Ranch were the model for overseas detachments. On Friday we would usually fly back to Burbank, California, to enjoy the beaches and golf courses for the weekend.

### **Team Spirit**

All detachment personnel were fully cleared and briefed on the nature and purpose of the project as well as its CIA sponsorship. Contractor personnel not directly involved with the detachment also were cleared, but they were not given access to any project details. Despite our rather intrusive role, our security team maintained a close rapport with other members of the detachment.

The bonds that developed among project members were to become a hallmark of the U-2 program. From the beginning, all elements of the program—pilots, contractors, security officers—developed a tremendous esprit de corps that was to last well beyond the program's termination. In particular, the initial group of 80 security officers selected to provide support for the U-2 program developed a great fraternal spirit, bound by their devotion to the mission and by their common experiences in a secluded and truly novel world.

I also experienced some sad moments while supporting the training at the Ranch. Occasionally, I would serve as a contact person in Burbank that served as a gateway for personnel going to or departing from the Ranch. Wilburn Rose, a new pilot, died in a training flight two days after I had dinner with him in Burbank to brief him on ground rules at the Ranch.

### **Compartmentation**

Another important aspect of the security program for the U-2 project was the creation of an entire new compartmented system for the product of U-2 missions. Access to the photographs taken by the U-2 was strictly controlled, often limiting the ability of CIA analysts to use the products of U-2 missions. To achieve maximum security, the U-2 program developed its own contract management, administration, financial, logistics, communications, and security

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*The Ranch.*

personnel, and thus did not need to turn on a day-to-day basis to the Agency directorates for assistance.

### **Pilot Training**

Most of the three-to-four-month training program in Nevada centered around the U-2 pilots. A dedicated cadre of trainers from the Strategic Air Command (SAC) was sent to the Ranch to train them. Initially, at least, the project used US Air Force pilots who held reserve commissions.

Air Force pilots interested in the U-2 project had to be willing to resign from the Air Force and assume civilian status to maintain the U-2 program's civilian cover. Although Air Force pilots were attracted by the challenge of flying U-2s over hostile territory, they were reluctant to leave the service and give up their seniority. Accordingly, the Agency offered attractive salaries, and the Air Force promised each

pilot that, upon satisfactory completion of his employment with the Agency, he could return to his unit. In the meantime, he would be considered for promotion along with his contemporaries who had continued their Air Force careers.

### **A Unique Program**

The U-2 program was one of the first of its kind, and it laid the groundwork for future collection and recruiting programs. Before the U-2 project, OS had provided personnel and physical security support to Agency components, but the project's close operational marriage with the military and industry was a first for the Office. The U-2 project established procedures for project development, security, contract management, tasking, operations, and information dissemination that remain applicable even in today's more advanced collection programs.

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### At the Sites

The first overseas site was (b)(1) (b)(1) in the United Kingdom also used by SAC. By 4 May 1956, Detachment A's personnel and equipment, including four U-2 aircraft, had arrived at (b)(1) via C-130 transport planes. Before the "Deuces" even began to fly, however, Britain's relations with the Soviet Union soured, and Prime Minister Eden asked for the U-2 flights to be delayed, believing the missions were too much of a political risk. Consequently, before the summer, Detachment A moved to Gieblestadt AFB in West Germany, near the border with East Germany, where it launched the first U-2 overflights of Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and the Middle East.

In the summer of 1956, 1 and three or four others arrived at Incirlik Air Base, near Adana, Turkey, to prepare for the arrival of Detachment B. Several months earlier, the US had approached Turkish Prime Minister Menderes for permission to fly reconnaissance missions over the Soviet Bloc from Turkey. Although Menderes had given his approval immediately, Detachment B, which was still being trained in Nevada, was not prepared for deployment when Egyptian President Nasser decided to nationalize the Suez Canal Company in July 1956. Because our unit would not be ready for deployment before the end of August and would not become established at Incirlik until early September 1956, Detachment A was assigned the first Middle East overflights, leaving a temporary base at Wiesbaden to overfly the eastern Mediterranean littoral and landing in Adana for refueling.

By the fall of 1956, Detachment B in Turkey was ready for operations, and it was in a better position to provide coverage of the Middle East. Under the covername Weather Reconnaissance Squadron Provisional II, Detachment B began flying missions in September. It soon became the primary detachment for Middle East overflights, conducting nine of the 10 such missions flown in October.

U-2 photography continued to keep the President and other key officials well informed about the progress of crises in the Middle East. The Adana detachment became the mainstay of U-2 activity for the next



three and a half years, primarily conducting periodic overflights to monitor the situation in the Middle East, including Beirut in 1958.

### Personnel on Site

Our Adana detachment fielded 80 to 100 people. In addition to our security contingent, detachments generally consisted of five to seven pilots who were the centerpiece of the organization. An Air Force colonel generally served as the commanding officer, with an Agency civilian as his deputy. The Air Force also provided flight planners and operations, weather, logistics, and medical officers, while communications officers and imagery analysts were Agency personnel.

Large contractor contingents, especially from Lockheed, which built the aircraft, also served each site. Each of the aircraft had its own maintenance crew of about six mechanics. The engine manufacturer (Pratt & Whitney), camera producers (Hycon and Perkin Elmer), and navigational equipment manufacturers (Baird Atomic), provided technicians to service their respective equipment.

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Detachment B shared the airfield with Turkish military aircraft. The airfield maintained six or so hangars that supported Turkish military aircraft, US Air Force B-47s, and Navy A-6s on TDY from Spain.

We lived in trailers on the base at Incirlik amid tough conditions. Turkey was by far the harshest of all the sites, although rotations between detachments helped to boost morale. Operational activity would be quiet for several weeks until such events as a Soviet missile firing or a crisis in the Middle East provoked missions. All three hangars would then open up with B-47s deploying for peripheral photographic or SIGINT missions and the A-6s for low-level operations. (In Australia in 1969, I learned over a drink with Harry Fitzwater, who later served as CIA's Director for Administration, that he flew A-6s in and out of Incirlik.)

### Security Operations

As deputy chief of the security staff at Adana, my first responsibility was to protect the aircraft and personnel physically and operationally, and the second was to bring the film from the overseas locations to the project headquarters in Washington. Basic guard duty was boring. Armed with .38-caliber handguns, our security team would set up a perimeter around the hangars and operations buildings to control access 24 hours a day. About 12 men were dedicated to securing the aircraft. Cameras supplemented our security. Fortunately, we never experienced any security break-ins during my watch.

Operational security was extremely important to the project's success. Throughout the early days of the U-2 program, the US Government remained sensitive to any possibility of public disclosure. It was decided that the best cover for the deployment of the U-2 was an ostensible mission of high-altitude weather research by the National Advisory Committee on Aeronautics, NASA's predecessor. This cover, which was scrupulously supported by our periodic cover briefings, lasted until the 1 May 1960 shootdown of U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers over the USSR. Even if the Soviets had known about the flights and their mission, they initially had little capability to do

anything about them. While they appeared to be able to track U-2 flights, interception proved impossible until the shootdown of Powers.

We tried to hide operational activity by staging the U-2 to its ultimate departure point for missions. For example, we staged Powers's U-2 to Pakistan before his May 1960 mission. The terminology used to describe U-2 aircraft and pilots also played a part in maintaining the security of the program. To reduce the chance of a security breach, the Agency always referred to the aircraft as "articles." Similarly, pilots were always called "drivers."

### Film Processing

To return the U-2's film to the US for processing and analysis, an armed security officer would travel on a C-119 from Turkey to Germany, where he would pick up a C-54 or C-118 to the United States. The officer, traveling with military orders under an effective SAC cover, would be the last man on the plane and the first one off to be sure no one had unauthorized access to the compartment holding the film. I never experienced any security problems during these flights.

Passing on the results of the missions to our consumers without compromising our source also presented a significant security challenge. The project director restricted the number of persons who could be cleared for access to U-2 photography. Moreover, we considered U-2 information too sensitive to use in CIA publications. Consequently, many analysts did not have access to information that would have greatly aided the production of intelligence estimates.

### Another Job

I returned from Turkey to the United States in December 1956 to join Detachment C, Weather Reconnaissance Squadron Provisional III, at the Ranch. A few months later, we transferred to Japan's Atsugi Naval Air Station. From Atsugi, we would

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stage necessary equipment and personnel to Eielson AFB outside Fairbanks, Alaska, in C-130 transports for several weeks whenever we wanted coverage of the USSR—usually against ballistic missile impact sites. By the time I returned to Turkey in 1958, U-2 activity had wound down.

I came home from my second tour in Turkey in December 1958, and I left the program to join the OS (b)(1). In the summer of 1960, Col. Stan Beerli, the commanding officer in Japan in 1957 and my commanding officer in Turkey in 1958, had become the director of project headquarters in Washington. He was just beginning to develop a new reconnaissance program, which was codenamed Oxcart; I accepted his offer to join that program, and I stayed with it until 1964.

### The Release of Powers

While at project headquarters, I assisted in the release of Powers in February 1962, who was exchanged for Soviet spy Col. Rudolf Abel. I was selected to identify Powers during the exchange because I had been with him while he flew U-2s from Turkey in 1956 and 1958.

On 10 February 1962, I joined the Chief of the US Mission to West Berlin Alan Lightner and Jim Donovan, the American lawyer who had negotiated the exchange, on the Glienecke Bridge that connects East and West Berlin to meet Powers and his escorts. Powers and I went from Berlin to Rhein Main near Frankfurt, where we boarded a C-118 for first-class travel home. Accompanying us on the trip back to the US were Col. Leo P. Geary, the USAF Headquarters Project Director (and my daughter's godfather!), and Donovan. En route, I told Donovan not to tell my father—coincidentally a professional friend of his and his Brooklyn neighbor—of my role in the release because I was still under cover.

### Appreciating Powers

"Frank" Powers was much like the other "drivers," a regular guy who loved to fly. As an Air Force officer, he had developed a strong work ethic and



Francis Gary Powers.

sense of duty. Most detachment personnel held him and the other drivers in awe and great respect, realizing that they were putting their lives on the line each time they flew a mission. During operational missions, everyone tensely awaited the pilot's safe return. And there always were the memories of the good and dedicated comrades, such as Wilburn Rose, who had lost their lives during training missions.

After Frank was released, he received mixed reviews from the vastly uninformed or misinformed American public and press. On the other hand, those officials who knew the man and his orders gave him an unqualified "well done." Particularly heartwarming was the reception he received from his former associate drivers and their wives at a reunion

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in California a few weeks after his release. I accompanied Frank to that reunion, and, true to the spirit of the U-2 program, Frank also attended my wedding shortly after his release.

While committed to the kinship of the U-2 program, Frank especially treasured his immediate family, with whom I remain in touch. He sometimes told me that his greatest hardship in captivity was the lack of communication with his family.

Frank became a celebrity, but publicity made him uncomfortable. Although he resisted pressures from ghostwriters and publishers to rush into print, he eventually began to write books. He always appeared reasonable and attentive to the US Government's concerns about classified information.

### Epilogue

After the shootdown of Powers, the U-2 operation gradually began to return to the US. We continued to operate from Edwards Air Force Base in California for several years, staging to other areas as necessary. Although I became increasingly involved in other projects, my heart would always belong to the program that forged such deep ties among its founders.

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